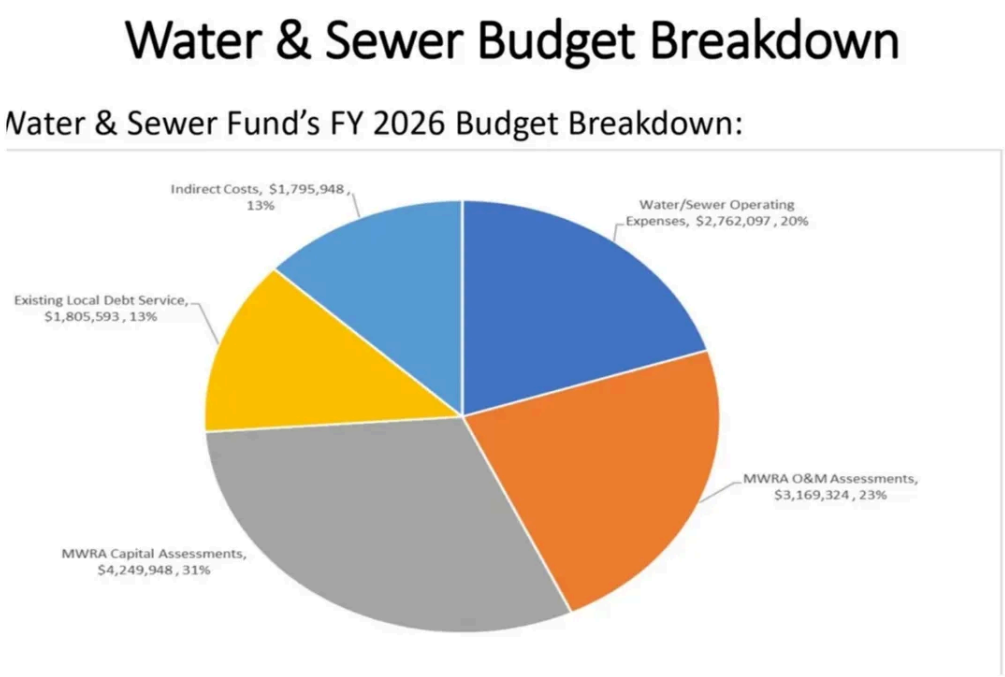
NEWS

Winchester residents could see water bills increase by up to 15%

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2025 . 6:00 AM — 4 min read



A look at the water and sewer budget breakdown for fiscal year 2026. COURTESY PHOTO/TOWN OF WINCHESTER

Rising water and sewer costs, a major development's environmen impact and key public safety appointments took center stage at th

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Winchester Select Board meeting on Feb. 24.

The board also received confirmation the town is officially in compliance with the state's MBTA Communities zoning law, a milestone that could unlock new housing and funding opportunities.

Steep water & sewer rate hikes loom

Water and sewer rates are poised to rise sharply due to escalating assessments from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA).

Consultant Matt Abrahams of The Abrahams Group presented Winchester's FY2026 Water & Sewer Rate Study, revealing the extent of the financial pressure.

• Water assessment: Up 18.5% ($376,000)
• Water Operations & Maintenance: Up 20.0% ($184,000)

• Sewer assessment: Up 7.3% ($393,000)
• Sewer O&M: Up 10.5% ($237,000)

The board considered three rate increase scenarios:

— Option 1: 6.75% in 2026, followed by a 15% hike in 2027
— Option 2: 12.5% in 2026, followed by 7.5% annual increases through 2030
— Option 3: 9% annual increases from 2026 through 2030

For the average household, this means a quarterly bill increase of between $14.54 and $27.27, depending on the selected option.

Board Chair Michelle Prior questioned whether alternative funding strategies could soften the impact.

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"If we had a very good revenue year, and some retained earnings, why would we have to go up 12% or even 9% this next year?" Prior asked.

Abrahams cautioned against banking on unpredictable revenue surpluses.

"If you do have that rainy summer, you won't necessarily bring in as much revenue," he explained.

A public hearing is set for March 10, after which the board will make its final decision.

Winchester achieves MBTA zoning compliance

Town Manager Beth Rudolph announced the state has officially recognized Winchester's compliance with Section 3A of the Zoning Act, which mandates that MBTA-adjacent communities create zoning districts to support multi-family housing.

"Winchester was recently informed that EOHLC had completed their review of our application for the MBTA Overlay District and determined that Winchester is in compliance with Section 3A," Rudolph said.

A Feb. 6 letter from Edward M. Augustus Jr., secretary of the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, confirmed the determination.

Winchester's overlay district spans 47.9 acres with a potential capacity of 1,396 multi-family units — nearly double the state's required density minimum of 15 units per acre.

This designation makes the town eligible for the MBTA Communities Catalyst Fund, which offers grants and technical assistance to facilitate housing initiatives.

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Fire Department promotions move forward

The board unanimously approved the promotion of James Whittaker from lieutenant to captain in the Winchester Fire Department. To expedite the process, members also voted to waive the standard 15-day appointment period at Rudolph's request.

10 Converse Place development faces environmental hurdles

Developers of 10 Converse Place are seeking to use town-owned land around Mill Pond to meet state environmental mitigation requirements, a move that has raised legal and procedural questions.

Larry Beals, of Beals Associates, explained that because the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has classified Mill Pond as a river, the project must comply with the Rivers Protection Act.

"The building's numbers did not meet performance parameters that would leave the riverfront in a 'better' state," Conservation Commission Chair David Miller said. "The proposed building was too big for the space."

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To address this, developers proposed:

- Restoring 3,950 square feet of riverfront on-site
- Mitigating an additional 6,164 square feet off-site at a 2:1 ratio
- Total mitigation: 10,114 square feet

However, Town Counsel Jay Talerman warned that a simple license agreement may not be legally sufficient for long-term environme commitments.

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"A mere license or a letter saying, 'go ahead and do this,' is not going to be sufficient," Talerman said. "If there's a condition that will last perpetually, or for as long as DEP suggests it wants to, we would likely need to convey an easement or take other formal action."

Miller also raised concerns about Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution, which protects public parkland from being converted for private use without a two-thirds vote of the state legislature.

The board opted to consult with the Conservation Commission and review the legal implications before making a decision.

Eversource transformer approved for EV stations

The board approved a license agreement with Eversource to install a transformer necessary to power electric vehicle charging stations at the Jenks parking lot.

Sustainability Director Ken Pruitt noted that while all equipment is in place, the town is waiting on Eversource to deliver the transformer.

"We're waiting on Eversource to deliver the transformer, but once it arrives, the charging stations will be fully operational," Pruitt said.

Board members expressed frustration over the delay but voted to approve the license to keep the project moving.

Consent agenda approvals

The board approved several items on its consent agenda, including:
• A one-day liquor license for an event at Studio on the Common on March 4.

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- Approval of the 11th Annual Kids PMC Bike Ride on June 14.
- Approval of a pony ride family event on April 12.

The board's March 10 meeting will feature a public hearing on water and sewer rates and the finalization of Spring Town Meeting warrant articles.

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utilit ratepayers over the next 10 maintains critical

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NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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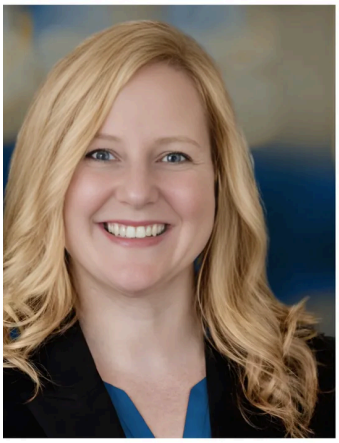

EVENTS

Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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